

A Bird and the Dragon

by JessieMay Kessler

Balboa Press

reviewed by Barbara Bamberger Scott

"I'm not sure when Sy and I married that we were fully prepared for how much work it would be to raise five girls in a blended family."

Author and therapist JessieMay Kessler has composed a paean to her long, loving relationship with a man she met in a group for single parents working through divorce.

Sy Kessler was coming away from marriage to an alcoholic. JessieMay had been involved in a marriage that had long since gone cold. The two became engaged while they were still in the couples therapy group. Together they had five growing daughters—Sy bringing two and JessieMay three to the blended home. Kessler's book is concerned with small but significant everyday events of their co-existence, in which Sy took the role of a "dragon" who would always protect his lady, and she, nicknamed Birdie as a child, would reciprocate by offering him a "warm, safe cave" as described in one of Sy's favorite poems. Their efforts to help their daughters develop as successful adults is a major part of that story. One daughter couldn't accept the new marriage and left the family. Others rebelled against the differing parenting styles, so Family Counseling Meetings were instituted. Religious differences were confronted, and home spaces altered. The girls grew up; there was retirement; there were weddings; and, then one fateful evening, Sy had heart problems.

Largely concentrating on family matters—houses, vacations, work, retirement—the dominant theme of Kessler's book is contentment. She and her husband didn't agree about everything but their love kept them on track. The author admits her account jumps around quite a bit, not tied to a strict chronology, and for some readers the mundane details of what is essentially a family memoir will not seem especially exciting. However, the story of the author and her husband's second-time-around romance may offer inspiration to others on the brink of such a relationship and wondering whether to take the plunge.

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